

THE LESSONS
OF HISTORY

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C. S. LEAVENWORTH

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BY

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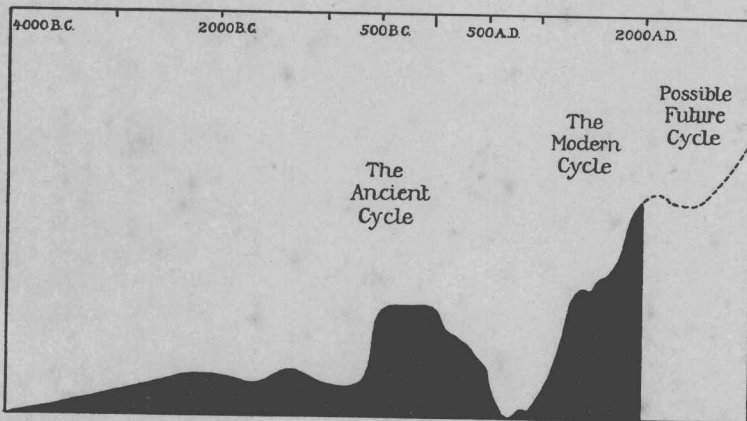
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CHAPTER I

CRATICS OR PRACTICAL HISTORY

THE object which mankind wants to achieve in this world is a rich and full civilization. A knowledge of the past shows that the causes are similar which bring



THE CHART OF CIVILIZATION

about the hope and achievement of civilization in different ages or allow the pathos and tragedy of its fall. Discoveries in the realms of knowledge or art produce civilization. Defects in human nature or inadequacy of environment are causes of its decline. If we can learn from history how these discoveries can be made and how these defects can be remedied then history has a

direct and practical bearing on our life of to-day. The study of the repetitions of the past can yield important lessons for the solution of the problems of the present.

The Substance of History Repeats Itself.

THE well-known proverb says that history repeats itself. This is true in the sense that there is an underlying substance or essence of history which repeats itself among the manifold changes of many centuries and in a myriad varying circumstances of different ages, dissimilar races and diverse places all over the world. This underlying substance of history is universal and instinctive, although it is only subconscious or inarticulate in the earlier centuries, becoming fully conscious as man makes more progress. The substance of history repeats itself because it is the continuous, upward-reaching desire of mankind for civilization.

These repetitions of the substance of history may be seen on the chart, where the cycles of civilization follow each other in an ascending series separated by more or less serious reversions toward barbarism. Man's desire for civilization in the fourth millenium B.C. caused an advance over the ignorance, scarcity and disorder of barbarism and originated the mysterious Sumerian culture of ancient Babylonia and the archaic art forms of early Egypt. Then came a depression, but the same desire for civilization was working, and the results were more satisfactory, as the next mountain top was reached in the law code of Hammurabi or the vast pyramids of the early Pharaohs. Then came another depression into barbarism but the substance of history was repeated under still more varied circumstances as Brahmanic India expounded the Vedas or ancient

China recorded eclipses of the sun. Still higher were the results when Greece and Rome made their contributions of art and order. But easy is the descent into barbarism, and there followed a very long and extremely deep relapse in the dark ages of European history. After that the highest mountain peak of all was reached in modern history and its culmination was attained in the wonderful nineteenth century, when the triumphs of applied science were added to civilization.

Many are the cycles of history, but they are all similar because each one has a rise, a climax and a decline, while in all of them there is the same transcendental instinct to achieve civilization which is the substance running through history.

Take the movements which, on a smaller scale, cluster around these great cycles. You can take almost any important movement of the present and you can find precedents for it in some historical movement of the past. In our complex civilization of to-day, if we pare away the variations on the surface, we find that the roots were growing in much the same way in former ages. This is true of the repetitions of cultural, or of economic, or of political history.

In culture we are not very far ahead of the philosophy of Plato. The philosophy of the present deals with the same problems which the great Greeks faced in their time. The attributes of the absolute, the problem of knowledge, the problem of evil, the ideals of goodness, truth and beauty, the quest of immortality;—all these puzzle us as they did the thinkers of Hellas, or the Brahmans of ancient India, or the priests of old Egypt.

Take another illustration. The cultures of Western civilization and of the Orient are beginning to get

better acquainted with each other on account of the increased facilities for travel and knowledge, which exist to a greater degree than at any previous time in modern history. This brings about a very fruitful result because of the comparison and exchange of ideas between European and Asiatic civilization. But this is only a repetition of the exchange of ideas between the ancient Greek world and the Orient of the ancient cycle which centered in the city of Alexandria, where the results of Greek and Hebrew, of Roman and Egyptian culture met and blended in a common product.

In economic history we have the distressing repetitions of the excessive use of paper money by various governments. During the French Revolution, for instance, the "*assignats*" were issued to an amount probably twenty times more than all the coined money in the country. Bankruptcy was the result. In colonial times in America paper money wrought great havoc. In the Confederate states we remember the story of the lady in Richmond who went to the market with her market basket full of paper money but brought back the beefsteak in her pocketbook. In the northern states "*greenbacks*" became a great menace to financial stability. Yet, in spite of all these lessons of history, several of the nations of Europe have done exactly the same thing over again after the World War, until their money is literally not worth the paper on which it is printed.

Or again, we find that a great war, by using up economic resources and by inflation of the currency, causes an increase in the cost of living. Food goes up in price; rents are dear; coal is scarce; cotton and wool for clothing are very expensive and furniture prices

soar to fabulous peaks. Yet, if we search history, we find that this is only a repetition of past precedents. We learn, for instance, that after the war of 1812, after the wars of Napoleon, after the Civil War, there was the same disturbing fact of the high cost of living which lasted for years. We find that similar causes prevailed; the exhaustion of resources, the inflation of the currency and the high wages of labor. The search for precedents in history shows that high prices for commodities must be expected for a time after every great war, but as the same history shows that prices eventually fall again, its study is as comforting to the harassed consumer as the prospect that Christmas is surely coming some time.

In political history Europe is experiencing at the present time a return to the system of the balance of power, only disguised in a sugar-coated manner. Competing groups of alliances are forming as in past centuries during the eras of the Bourbons against the Hapsburgs, or of the Triple Entente against the Triple Alliance.

Take another example. There are the same problems to be faced in the policies of the far-flung empire of Britain as there were in the widespread empire of Rome at its best. Scattered colonies require quick communications. Hence the Roman roads and the British navy. Such vast dominions must use native auxiliary troops to supplement the soldiers of the metropolis. An enlightened imperial policy encourages intercolonial trade and desires world peace for its prosperity. Hence it brings good order to millions of men, safety for a fruitful commerce and peace to a war-weary world.

That which prevents to a large extent the study and application of these repetitions of history is the great

variety of historical events. The occurrences of a single year would fill volumes. Herbert Spencer has drawn up a general statement of the evolutionary process which can be translated from the long and many syllabled words of the definition of that great master into the language of everyday life as the development from the simple to the complex. It is this increasing complexity of historical events and interrelations which makes it so difficult to see the simple lessons concealed behind their manifold variations. We cannot count the grains of sand on the seashore. We cannot see the wood for the trees, and the variations of history prevent our getting at its substance.

Take the invention of the printing press, for instance. That wonderful discovery was one of the most important ever made in the history of the world and some thinkers even consider that it may be the means of safeguarding our civilization from the fate which has so often overtaken the civilizations of the past. Yet the substance of that discovery is really the same as the discovery of writing way back in the early dawn of history, for it is due to the same desire of man to communicate the results of civilization or to store them up in permanent records for the use of succeeding generations. The substance has been the desire for means of communication and the result has been the almost geometrical progression of civilization. Almost numberless, however, have been the variations of this original substance in the history of world civilization. Hieroglyphics were used in Egypt and in China, but they proved too cumbersome and were superseded by alphabets. Materials for writing like clay and wax tablets or papyrus had their day and finally yielded to the invention of paper. Manuscripts were multiplied with

great difficulty and the range of the communication of ideas was small. Men had to rely on the rumors of the market place communicated by word of mouth instead of on the vastly more efficient medium of the modern newspaper, when it tries to be accurate. Printing has made this art of communication more perfect, and yet even with that advance how different are the records and how difficult it is to get at the truth, the various phases of which they try to convey. Even printing cannot be called the final discovery in this great art of communication. The time may come, for instance, when the slow and cumbrous method of writing in longhand will be superseded by a time-saving system of shorthand symbols which will be taught in all our schools, and may some bright genius perfect a device to prevent the blight of illegible handwriting! But the substance of history remains the same throughout this multiplicity of variations; that is, the desire to achieve a more perfect civilization by more perfect arts of communication.

Far more difficult is it to trace this desire for civilization, this underlying substance of human history which manifests itself under so many variations, than it is to follow the biological processes which govern the life of a plant, or a tree, or an animal species, because of the element of the unexpected which occurs from time to time in world history. The surprises in the history of a plant or an animal are fewer because instinct is more uniform than emotion and because their environment is limited in area.

The stuff with which world history deals is something far more complex than these, for it is human nature and its environment through the ages. But this stuff which we call human nature is subject to surprises

and contradictions and to the unexpected, at least until the new science of psychology can reduce it to better order. Environment also is full of surprises and the unexpected. Both past civilization and present civilization have been, and are now, swayed by the swift currents of incomprehensible human nature. It is too often the emotions of men and not their reason which have made history and as for the caprices of women, a Cleopatra, or an Elizabeth of England, or a Catherine of Russia, they are past finding out, or rather have been hard to fathom until modern women got the vote. Environment, too, is uncertain, for the winds of heaven could dash the Spanish Armada to pieces and change history, at least in its immediate effects, and could also blow gently and bring William of Orange safely into Torbay harbor and rescue England from the autocracy and bigotry of James II.

Take the era of the Tokugawa Shogunate in Japan. That country after its first experience of Europeans had shut out all foreign influence. None reached it except what could leak in from the Dutch merchants through the high wooden palisades built around the little island of Deshima at Nagasaki. The wonderful art life of Japan grew calmly and slowly without any interruptions or surprises like a rare flower in a sheltered garden. Then suddenly boomed the guns of Perry's fleet at the gateway of Dai Nippon. The unexpected had occurred. The Japanese, with their bright intelligence and patriotic desire for national progress, eagerly adopted Western science and Western ways and a whole new life began in eastern Asia. An unexpected change, unique in all Japanese history, had occurred.

And yet the substance of history is not interrupted

by this element of the unexpected as much as disturbances on the surface of history would lead us to think, for the great historical movements sweep on like the irresistible tides of the ocean.

The Formula of History.

So continuous is the substance of history, which repeats itself again and again in spite of many variations and unexpected events; this prevailing desire of mankind to achieve and preserve civilization, that we may in time reach the cold precision of mathematics and derive a formula of history which will express the underlying continuity of the life of the human race in this world.

Such a formula would be helpful to an understanding of just what history really is. History has a twofold meaning. It is, in the first place, the events which happen as the result of the vital, creative life of the world and it is, in the second place, the description of those events with its crown in the literary work of the great historians who have encased the story of vital happenings in the artistic forms of genius.

History, based on the continuity of this vital, creative force, may be defined as the slowly unfolding life of the world's civilization in its varied and uneven progress out of barbarism.

Hence, the historical description of this life of the race must be a very comprehensive study in its method. It must take into account all phases of life, looking not only at the scientific basis, but at the literary and practical sides as well. In short, it must be a philosophical interpretation of history with all the breadth of method used by philosophy.

Furthermore, the formula of history cannot be a static or stationary formula referring to fixity of conditions, but must be a dynamic or progressive formula and must allow for growth, and for variations, and for the unexpected surprises which come in the course of time. It must show not only the repetitions of history, but its progress, which is its life.

This nature of history as the unfolding life of the race is responsible for the controversy between those who consider that history is one of the sciences and those who argue that history has a peculiar method of treatment of its own. The latter view is held by H. Rickert, in *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*,¹ who asserts that science deals with general laws, while history has a different method because it studies special and individual events.

His difficulty, however, is that hardly anything can really be called exclusively individual or unique in history. Almost every occurrence has a similar precedent in the times which have gone by. It may not be identical with that, as two crystals are identical in shape with each other, but it is similar. Even the battle of Waterloo, remarkable as it was, can hardly be called a unique and particular event when Sir Edward Creasy could group it with other great battles in his celebrated book, *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World from Marathon to Waterloo*. History can group repetitions together and is scientific to that extent, but it is literary and practical as well, and requires a broad philosophical interpretation which in-

¹ See the summary of his theory by Prof. F. M. Fling in the *American Historical Review*, IX : 1. Also see W. Windelband, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, pp. 277-299.

cludes the narrower scientific method in it. Science gives us laws but history teaches us lessons.

History is broad in its method because it touches life on all sides in the progress of civilization. Therefore its formula is a proportion of ratios or sequences and not a static and stationary equation. The formula can be expressed in this way: The *Substance* of a historical problem was to its *Result* in a past age as the same underlying *Substance* (but with many *Variations* and allowing also for the *Unexpected*) will be to a similar *Solution* in the present.

Let us take an example under this formula where the substance of a historical problem was repeated almost identically, so that we can have a very simple lesson because the variations and the unexpected element are almost negligible. This example is to be found in the history of Great Britain in the eighteenth century. The union between Scotland and England was in peril on account of pretenders to the throne of the fallen Stuart dynasty. Jacobite influence which fomented rebellion was strong in the North. In 1715 there was a rising on behalf of the banished dynasty, which had been overthrown in the former century. The pretender to the throne arrived in Scotland bent on regaining the power. His followers rallied around him and the rebellion began. The English troops, however, advanced and dispersed the rebels and the pretender fled. The rebel leaders were impeached and two of them were executed.

Then in 1745 the event was repeated, the substance of the first rebellion happening in almost identical fashion again. The adherents of the fallen Stuarts raised a revolt in Scotland, as before. The young pretender landed there. Some victories were gained but

finally, as before, the English crushed the rebellion. The pretender fled. The rebel lords were captured and executed.

These two historical rebellions illustrate the formula of history, because the substance of the first rebellion in 1715 had as its result a complete failure and should have been a lesson to the plotters in 1745. It was a personal and dynastic struggle. No principle of liberty or rising against oppression was involved in it. If the Jacobites of 1745 had attended classes of historical instruction as zealously as military drills, it would have been impressed upon their minds that there had been very few and unimportant variations in conditions since 1715 and also that the unexpected in the shape of an effective foreign assistance was not likely to occur. They might have seen that the same kind or substance of rebellion was going to end in the same failure as in 1715. They might have used their heads to save their heels and to save their heads as well.

This same lesson of foolish and unsuccessful rebellion where no inspiring cause of progress or of human liberty is served but merely the personal ambition of some deposed leader or aspiring adventurer is promoted, with the same result of devastating violence and loss of life, can be found repeated again and again in history. It is like the story of the so-called "Square of the Revolution." A traveler in a turbulent little republic found a large and ornate monument in the midst of a beautiful square in the capital city and on it he read this inscription, "To the memory of the great and glorious revolution." He asked a citizen of the country when this glorious revolution had occurred. The citizen replied that they had so many revolutions in the government that the date on the monu-

ment had been left blank and then it could be in honor of any or of all of their glorious revolutions.

We can see from another example how the cause of progress may be served when the right kind of a leader gains power in a country. At a number of different times in the history of China there have been periods of great disorder when strong men have gradually forced their way to the Dragon Throne and inaugurated new dynasties, and periods of high civilization have been achieved. Thus, the beginning of the celebrated T'ang dynasty in the seventh century was due to the rise to supreme power of one of the Chinese generals who at a time of great disorder seized the throne and founded a new house as the emperor Kao Tsu. Again, in the tenth century during a troublous epoch a powerful general gained the supremacy and began the great Sung dynasty as the emperor T'ai Tsu. Later in history, when the Mongol dynasty was disintegrating in the fourteenth century, an ambitious chieftain founded the Ming or "brilliant" dynasty and became its first emperor.

The substance of all these foundations of new dynasties was the same, the desire to end anarchy and have good order. The result was also the same in all these cases, for strong governments were founded and periods of high civilization began. The condition of China in the twentieth century is of the same substance as in these earlier centuries, only with more variations. Now, as then, the seeds of a great increase in civilization are already planted and are only waiting for a period of good order to let them grow. Now, as then, the Chinese people need a strong leader to curb self-seeking satraps who would divide the land among them.

The variations in the situation now, as compared with former times, are the threatening foreign powers, the debts to foreign governments, the new trunk line railroads, and the standing armies with modern training and equipment maintained by the great *tuchuns*, the leaders in the provinces.

The unexpected element is the Chinese republic, a new form of government which had never been even dreamed of before the advent of Western influence in China.

The solution of the present disorders may work out as in the past but under new conditions. There will be no restoration of the monarchy. The Chinese people are too democratic to revive that, but there may be a strong man, a "Ta Jen," who will arise and as president or premier of the republic restore order, much as is the fashion now in Italy under Mussolini, or in Spain, or as it was under the strong hand of President Diaz in Mexico. This would be only a temporary expedient, for the forms of the republic would be preserved and China would have more and more self-government as good order becomes more and more secure.

Thus we see that the present may learn an important lesson from the past in China, with allowances made for variations in present conditions and for the unexpected. Following the formula, the substance of past cases was that a strong leader arose. The result was the enforcement of good order. A similar solution may come again by a repetition of the same substance, that is, the government of a strong man as in the dynasties of T'ang, Sung or Ming. The variations are not prohibitive and the republic, although unexpected from any precedent in former Chinese history, can be